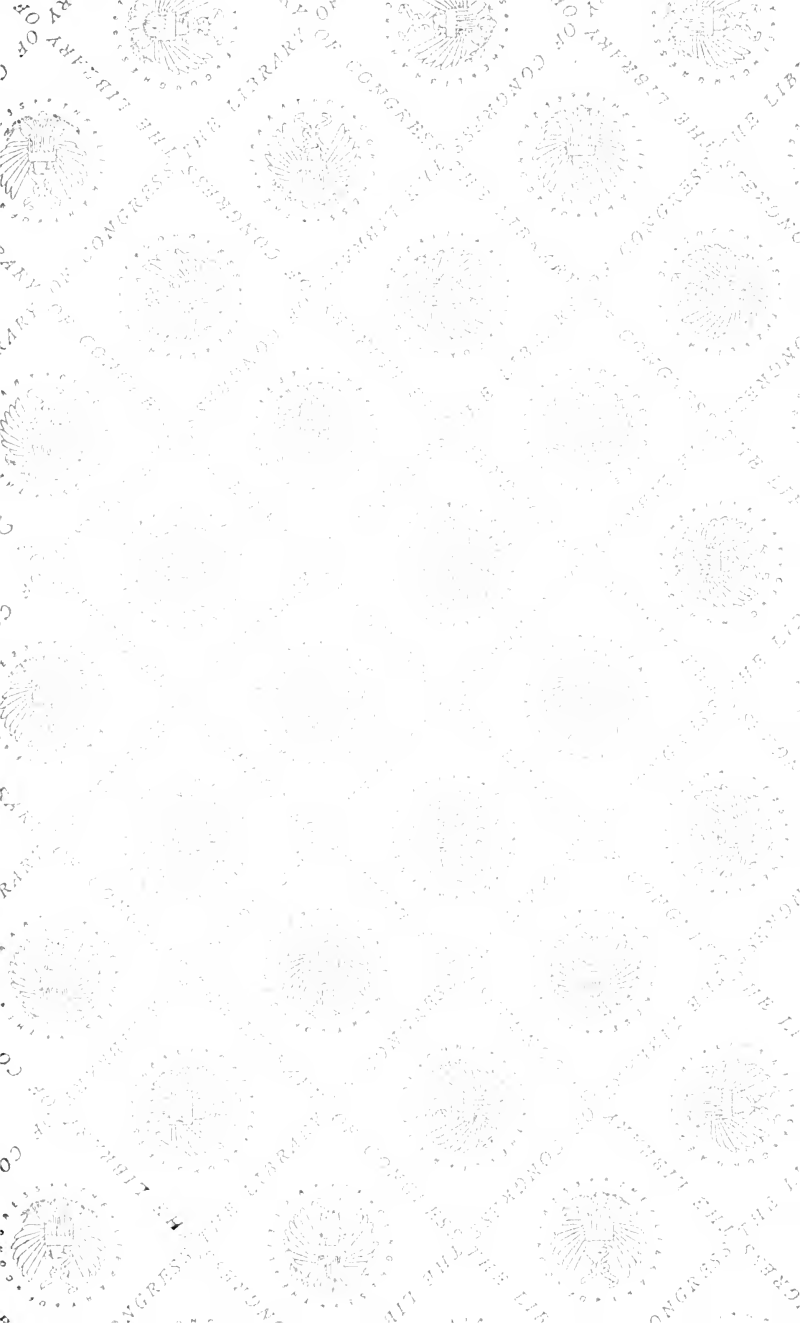


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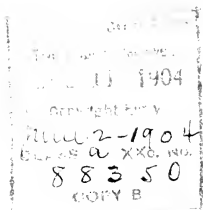
1904



A SONG
OF
THE LATTER DAY

BY
FREDERICK PETERSON

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TO MY WIFE

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EVOLUTION AND PANTHEISM

I

EVOLUTION AND PANTHEISM

FROM the sea-deeps unto this latter day
I climbed the spiral Stair of Life to gain
This hour of mine, this hour of human pain,
This hour of human joy that cannot stay.

One moment from a hundred million years—
Out of eternity! I waited long
For this brief space of tenderness and song,
Of dreams and music, happiness and tears.

L. of C.

One flash to view the majesty of earth,
The glooms of space, the pageantry of Time,
The web of orbits in a woof sublime,
The mighty suns' recurrent death and birth.

So short a waking out of endless night !
The glow-worm's glimmer that is gone so soon
In the brown twilight of the drowsy June
Were scarcely briefer than that human light.

Thou hast climbed with me from that lowly place
Up from the sea-deeps to this latter day
(O sweet companion of a weary way!)
Till lately blindly, though with equal pace.

We had no leader ; neither knew to choose
The certain path, yet upward change by change
We rose through lives mysterious and strange—
We blossomed from the sun-dust and the ooze.

First flame and water, then the tiny cell,
That seized the carbon miracle of life
And wrought a myriad monsters ere the strife
Had end—long since we passed them, knew the

Ah, brothers of the fern-morass and fen,
Ah, brothers of the great, gray, wandering sea,
Creatures of air, of quagmire, and of lea—
All hail! ye lost progenitors of men!

Ye, and the legions after you, lay deep
Ensorcelled in the strata of the earth,
Waiting the Magic Reader of your birth,
Your death, your wayward course from sleep to sleep.

Ye were the first born of the Mother Clay!
Volcanoes girt and lightning scarred her frame,
Earthquake and warring wind and flood and flame
Lay bare the passion of that natal day.

'Twas from the self-same moist hot glebe we came
With hand and foot and wing and fin and hoof ;
One Mother bore us, one ancestral roof
Was ours, one milk, and one primordial name.

We scattered on a thousand different ways
And grew estrangèd in our banishment ;
Skyward and landward, seaward far we went,
Through æons that were brief and swift as days.

We fought as aliens in the steaming fens ;
We battled on the tempest-rent plateaus ;
We fed upon our brothers ; and, as foes,
We lured them into eyries, lairs and dens.

In glare of levin, through the thunder's roar,
We ran the gauntlet of carnivorous jaws
And saurian coils, red eyes and horrid claws—
Through all that bloody chaos on we bore !

'Tis the same story to this later day :
Still ring the war-songs, still the shafts are hurled
Against our brothers round the crimsoned world,
Where Life and Death dispute their ancient sway.

And O, remorseless Mother, thou hast seen
Some die for faith and some in tender youth
For the great light that lit their souls, for truth,
By fagot, sword and ruthless guillotine.

Sometimes a madness seized upon the soul
Like to a tempest on a summer sea,
Roused up by wrong and black iniquity
To blood-red Terror and wild Carmagnole.

What blood hath drenched and sanctified the earth!
What blood of ours and blood of kith and kin,
By war and hunger spilled, hath been mixed in
That sovereign dust whereof come death and birth!

Behold for consciousness that dust prepare
And spirit and breath to very dust return—
All forms of life ground in the mighty quern
Of the old earth to feed the Godhead there!

THE STREAM OF LIFE

II

THE STREAM OF LIFE

THE stream of life flows down from the wide past,
And narrows to a strait in you and me,
And then expands again, broad as the sea,
And shoreless in the Scheme of Being vast.

Flotsam and jetsam have been brought to us,
And we our portion to the torrent give,
Turbid or pure—that which has strength to live,
And stain or clear the living waters thus.

Through us it sweetens or it bitter grows,
And that sweet-bitter quality shall sweep
Ever-increasing through that boundless deep
Of purpose toward the future where it flows.

We are the Past, from us the Future streams
Into vast distances, toward some goal
Foreshadowed only to the dazzled soul,
Beyond the flight of visions or of dreams.

THE PROCESSION OF THE RETREATING GODS

III

THE PROCESSION OF THE RETREATING GODS

IN yonder West beyond the purple rim
Of the far sundown lands, behold a throng
Of ghostly shapes that slowly moves along—
The Gods retreating in the shadows dim !

Strange forms and faces, stern or full of woe,
Grotesque, uncouth, barbaric and malign,
Some glorious with a majesty divine—
The idols of old peoples long ago !

Sceptres and crowns they bear, and drooping wings,
Strange jewels, crosses, spears and banners furled,
Regalia of old empires of the world
Of Phantasy, once ruled by Spirit-Kings.

Forgotten Gods of many an alien race,
Lords of the earth, air, water, fire and sky,
Demons of Hell, and Angels of Most High,
And here the Moon-god's, there the Sun-god's face !

And where the dark is thickest, in the lead,
Uncertain with his new-found human hands,
There awkward gropes, or hesitating stands,
The monkey-god of our remotest creed !

And near us pass inscrutable, serene,
The Holy Seers of later age and day,
From old Benares and from Mecca gray—
These two beside the gentle Nazarene.

Down the dim trail these wanderers are gone,
Once fashioned by our human faith and breath,
The lords of life, the conquerors of death,
Forth into darkness !—lo, behold the Dawn !

THE NEW FAITH

IV

THE NEW FAITH

FOR now the potent Alchemist of Light
Touches the peaks with wands of ruby fire,
And pinnacle and fortalice and spire
Flash roseate o'er the shadows of the night.

Ah, magical glad morning-light of Truth,
Still faint and dim but prescient of new day,
The new God comes to sweep the old away,
To bring new life, new hope, new strength, new youth.

We dwell in valleys where as yet the dark
Hangs o'er us, but the silent peaks on high
Fling out their flaming pennons to the sky,
As oriflammes the coming day to mark.

We hear the music of the rising wind,
The matin of the birds, the wild bees' hum,
The thousand sounds that through the night were
A myriad murmurs in one hymn combined—

A planet-pæan, one mysterious song
From out the valleys, hills and lonely seas,
That tells of God-in-All and vast decrees
Of order, justice, law that knows no wrong,

Of infinite patience toiling toward the Best
Through what seems ill to our poor mortal eyes,
Of promise that the new Dawn realize
The noblest visions born of human breast.

THE APOTHEOSIS OF DUST

V

THE APOTHEOSIS OF DUST

O MAN, thou wondrous fabric of the clay,
How hast thou climbed from that far place to this,
Through what world-maelstroms in the vast abyss
Of space and time, where Fate decreed the way!

Fate tossed thee on a tiny planet's crust,
The endless circles of the void to roam;
This green sun-tethered ball became thy home,
And thou—the Apotheosis of Dust.

For God-like art thou, there's a God in thee
Striving for beauty in some grand design,
Which thou imperfect can'st not yet divine,
Till that imprisoned God is once made free!

Yea, all the Gods are creatures of thy mind,
And all the virtues born of thy high soul;
'Tis thy ideals that, from pole to pole,
From age to age, have glorified thy kind.

Thou smilest in dying, yea, wilt sacrifice
On any altar that seems true to thee
Thy little moment of Eternity,
Nor reckon aught of Hell or Paradise!

And thine the arts of song and pipe and string
That teach the Soul the ways of dreams to go,
The rapturous pathways winding to and fro
Between Forgetting and Remembering.

With burin, brush and chisel thou hast made
The picture speak, the formless marble breathe—
There is a power whose thoughts of beauty seethe
In thee, and all thy striving brain pervade,

A God-in-All, impetuous to express
His beauty manifold, his plan profound,
Through light and color, motion, form and sound,
Through towering thoughts, and passions limitless.

LOVE

VI

LOVE

AS in the night some eager searching wind
Exults upon a windharp's eerie strings,
So plays the World-wind from the Source of Things
Across the chords of consciousness and mind.

When God gave Life to us He gave us Love,
Linking our souls to His divinity,
Lest we forgot in all the stress to be
His Heaven and our inheritance thereof.

And countless lovers under countless stars,
Once one with all this world of seeming death,
Are fused again by that immortal breath
That blows from space across our prison bars.

THE PROPHECY OF EVOLUTION

VII

THE PROPHECY OF EVOLUTION

THAT tiny particle of life that rose
Through the abysm of time to make a man—
Is this not promise of a vaster plan,
A higher climb to heights no man yet knows?

As the seed struggles cramped and in the dark
Up toward the light, up toward the perfect flower,
So we, toward light and knowledge, love and power,
Fixing our eyes on some diviner mark.

The low-browed Cave-man cowering with fear
Of wild things, wind and thunder, and the night,
Grew hero, grew exultant in the might
Of mind, became philosopher and seer.

The elements are slaves and mind his nod ;
He reins and curbs the forces from his car,
His whispers almost heard from star to star ;
He grasps the lightnings like a very god !

O poets, dreamers, man shall yet fulfill
Your august promise in some after time,
Travel to heights more splendid, more sublime,
Be of the angels that ye picture still !

The cities that now blacken the sweet earth
Shall go the way of Thebes and Babylon,
Be mounds all green and fragrant in the sun
Until new cycles witness their re-birth,

With fairy pinnacles and many a dome
All white above the garden-studded hills,
As if the builders bended to their wills
Tissue of cloud and fabric of sea-foam.

CHANGELESSNESS AND CHANGE

VIII

CHANGELESSNESS AND CHANGE

THE Dolphin, Swan and Eagle nightly keep
Their ancient watch o'er human joys and woes,
And the old primal music ebbs and flows
On shores where moon and trades still rule the deep.

The seasons come as yesteryear they came ;
The rose of yesterday seems this day's rose ;
The hills re-whiten with their annual snows ;
All, all return, yet nevermore the same !

For Changelessness is but a veil for Change,
Hiding the flux of things, the implacable flow
Of continents toward the sea, the slow
Upheaval of the earth-folds range on range.

The very rocks are plastic, turn to dust
And feed the herds upon the grassy plain,
The larger life of consciousness to gain,
Holding the striving soul of earth in trust.

THE QUEST



IX

THE QUEST

A HUNDRED centuries of towering fanes
To show the road—yet none knows where it leads !
Ten thousand years of formulas and creeds
And still the secret of the world remains !

The round earth bristles with its countless spires
That point the way to all the ends of space,
Where sit the gods that rule our mortal race
Enthroned amidst the firmament of fires.

Ah, might we follow to the bounds of space
Lit by illusive beacons, should we find
The Why and Wherefore that distract the mind,
Or ride forever on a Phantom Chase?

If we might flash like light from sphere to sphere
Should we disclose the Planner and the Plan,
Or fail,—and then return to earth and man
To dare again the Ancient Riddle here?

For surely here in man's unfathomed soul
Shut fast within its narrow cranial cell,
Lie reaches wide as Heaven and deep as Hell—
The world, the universe, the mirrored Whole!



A GLIMPSE BEHIND THE VEIL

X

A GLIMPSE BEHIND THE VEIL

ONE force, one element? Nay, force alone,
One force there is upbuilds in myriad phase
This flowing world-stuff and these vast displays
Of action in the Unknown and the Known.

Ah, life were but an hour of bitter grief
Between eternities, if this were all—
To wake—to know—to sleep, whate'er befall,
Among these wonders—'twere beyond belief!

Shut in by night and death and blinding doom
One glimpses still the fitful shimmerings
Of light amidst the tangled Woof of Things—
The Spirit of the World beside the Loom!

Up from the deeps of the sub-conscious mind
What dim penumbrae of ideals rise,
Haunting suggestions of realities
Beyond the vision of our eyes half-blind!

The visible world is but a chrysalis
Closed in for wintry æons till the Spring
Lay bare the glamour of the splendid wing—
Its soul's triumphant metamorphosis!

"COURAGE, CAMARADE,
LE DIABLE EST MORT"

XI

"COURAGE, CAMARADE, LE DIABLE EST MORT "

THIS hour between the cradle and the urn,
The largesse of the earth and winds and skies,
O make it good and gentle, brave and wise,
That bounty of our Mother to return !

Away with habit, sloth and prison-bars !
Let us keep holy vigils, climb the steep,
Explore high Heaven, and watch from deep to deep
The mighty drama of the whirling stars !

A dreamless sleep from all eternity—
A dreamless sleep through cycles yet to come—
And shall I then be sightless, soundless, dumb,
For this one hour that was decreed to me?

Surcease of joy is one with ease of pain ;
Why steep the senses in the drowsy juice
Of poppy, or the Demon Wine let loose
To blight the climbing visions of the brain ?

Why close the gates against the morning light,
The stir of force that shall be, is, has been,
In peopled planets and in suns that spin
Like swarms of fireflies in the dome of night ?

"THE YEARS THAT BRING
THE PHILOSOPHIC MIND"

XII

"THE YEARS THAT BRING THE PHILOSOPHIC MIND"

IN some old garden's tranquildest recess,
The throstle singing by the gliding burn,
Fragrant with bloom amid the moss and fern,
Far from the city's turmoil and distress—

There let us seize the vagrant, wingèd hours,
The while the cedar marks them one by one
With slender shadow—gnomon of the sun
Circling the tinted dial of the flowers!

Perhaps the peace of yonder cloud and sky,
The patience of the tireless, ancient earth,
So kind to grief, so serious to mirth,
May touch our hearts to their serenity.

There let us read some old exulting song
Out of men's souls distilled with deathless rhyme
In the alembic of the world and time—
Triumphant music of the great and strong,

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B

Who risen from dust have swept a thousand strings
Vibrant with being ; to the stars arise
Their songs of passions and of destinies—
Immortal incense out of mortal things.





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